FRIENDS OF
Fishbourne
ROMAN PALACE

Issue 6: November 2007

The CDC branches out

If you have visited the Collections Discovery Centre since it opened to the public last year you will doubtless have peered into the conservation lab through the large viewing window in the main foyer. Only in the last few weeks, however, will you have been sure of seeing a conservator at work. We are delighted that we now have a permanent conservator, Eveline van Breemen, working on keeping the collections in tip-top condition and protecting them against the ravages of time.

Eveline, a recent graduate from the University of Lincoln is a specialist in the conservation of metals and mosaics (the two parts of the collection that are in the most urgent need of attention), but is also fully qualified to work on the full range of artefacts kept in the CDC.

She will also be working on the other collections belonging to Sussex Archaeological Society, held in East Sussex. It is also hoped that she will be able to win contracts from organisations and individuals outside the Society, which will help to fund her Society work.

It is great having Eveline around. She and her legendary bike are already a big hit with staff and visitors alike.

The conservation lab has a permanent residant at last!

Eveline and her legendary bike, Betty.

Eveline says, "It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to work at a site as well known and important as Fishbourne. My first task in this new post is to ensure that the conservation lab is fully equipped, so I have been spending a lot of time ordering all the necessities for a fully functioning conservation department. Next, I hope to undertake a full condition survey of the Fishbourne metal artefacts and carry out any overdue work on vulnerable items. I look forward to reporting on my progress in the next newsletter. Even more, I look forward to meeting some of the Friends of Fishbourne, so please feel free to say "hello" on any future visits".

Fishbourne Roman Palace opening times

Now until 16th Dec: open every day, 10am-4pm
17th Dec until 21st Jan: open Sat & Sun, 10am-4pm
21st Jan until 29th Feb: open every day, 10am-4pm
1st March onwards: open every day, 10am-5pm

Contact

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SUSSEX PAST The Sussex Archaeological Society
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Archive enters the 21st Century

In the last issue of the Friends of Fishbourne newsletter we reported that a grant has been awarded to the Palace to help preserve for future generations the paperwork that relates to the 50 various excavations on the site since 1960. It is now possible to report that the project is very much under way. The paper archive will now not only be protected from degradation, but also looks much smarter and, importantly, will be catalogued on a computer so that a single sheet of paper can be located at the click of a mouse. It has in fact turned a number of visiting archivists green with envy. We will keep you all up to date on the progress of this project.

In addition to this, no fewer that seven volunteers have spent the last few months converting Barry Cunliffe's original site notes made as he excavated the Palace between 1960 and 1968 into digital format. Information from 31 notebooks and dozens of site drawings have been entered into a database so that basic information can be extracted with ease (preventing wear and tear on the original notebooks). It is also hoped that it will be possible to cross reference certain pieces of information for the first time.

Potentially, it will be possible to include a GIS aspect to the information, enabling spatial and other analyses that even Cunliffe himself may have thought impossible.

Police called to the Palace

On the 4th of July Rob, the curator at Fishbourne Roman Palace, found himself calling upon the assistance of the local police force. That afternoon one of our volunteers, working on re-boxing the Chichester District Museum collections, found in amongst the usual bags of Roman glass and medieval pottery, a live round of ammunition.

The police attended promptly and it came as no surprise that the bullet would have to be taken away and destroyed. This presented us with an unusual dilemma: because we aim to curate everything in the collections indefinitely, there is no formal mechanism for permanently removing any object from the CDC!

The solution? West Sussex Police have been *loaned* the bullet for destructive sampling. The percentage to be sampled has been specified as 100%.

Britain BC: A great success

As advertised in the last newsletter, in late May, Fishbourne Roman Palace and Chichester District Museum hosted a one-day event focussed on our prehistoric past.

During the day, the CDC was filled with youngsters who were given the opportunity to make models of an Iron Age boat or shield. Particularly popular was our resident textile expert, who provided, among other things, demonstrations and lessons in ancient spinning methods.

Since the daytime activities were aimed at children, the evening was very much the reserve of adults. Nicholas Ashton, senior Curator of Prehistory at the British Museum entertained and amazed vistors with a lecture on British palaeontology. The range of subject matter covered was extensive, but not at all to the detriment of the depth or clarity of delivery. It was particularly gratifying that Nick was willing to discuss his work on the earliest evidence of humans in Britain, focussing on a group of sites in Norfolk that due to their international importance had previously been shrouded in secrecy.

Dates for your Diary

18th-21st February 2008:
Family Fun Days
Hands-on activities for all the family

5th-6th April 2008:
Celtic Spring Festival
Find out more about the Celts

21st May 2008:
Sax at the Palace
Saxophonist Amonn Al-Mahrouq

9th July 2008:
Lindsay Davis
Author of the Falco novels

10th July 2008:
Duo Durado
Baroque music

11th July 2008:
Treasure Island
Open air theatre with Quantum Theatre Company

31st July and 2nd, 7th, 14th, 21st & 28th August 2008:
Fun Time Thursdays
Crafty things to make and do

Adopt-a-Box update

Since its launch a year ago, the "Adopt-a-Box" scheme has proved to be a huge hit with many of our visitors. So far nearly 100 boxes have been adopted, raising £760 towards the upkeep of the collections. We are currently undertaking a comprehensive survey of the collection, identifying boxes that are overfilled, and decanting their contents into two or more new boxes. The money raised throught the scheme will help towards the cost of the considerable number of new boxes that will be needed for this task.

New Discoveries in the Collections

It is not unknown for visitors to the Collections Discovery Centre to pose the question, "why do you bother keeping so much uninteresting material?". While it is clear to us why the collections must form the backbone of any archaeological site, a concise explanation can be dificult to find and may possibly leave sceptics even more sure of their scepticism.

Fortunately, a recent discovery in the bulk store by Martyn Allen, our resident PhD student, is bound to be of help. Martyn, while sorting through animal bone fragments from Fishbourne Harbour, discovered a previously unrecognised piece of worked bone. This item, identified at the time as a fragment of unidentifiable animal bone, on closer inspection turns out to be a piece of antler depicting the image of a bird.

The bird inlay. The piece was marked at the time of excavation, before the image was noted.

The original purpose of this artefact is not entirely clear (it may have been a piece of inlay or formed part of a larger image). However, it certainly provides justification for the long term storage of our collections. Had the animal bone from the site been discarded at any point since its excavation in the early 1980s, then this little piece of art would never have come to light.

This is just one of several new discoveries made by Martyn during his research. We will try and keep you up to date with his progress, but if you would like to hear the full story, you will probably have to wait to read his entire thesis when he finishes it in 2009!

Friends Events: Have your say

We endeavour to provide the Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace with just that little bit extra. In addition to free entry to the Palace, this newsletter, and more, we do our best to get you involved through occasional special events.

We would be very grateful if you could find a few moments to complete this short questionnaire, so that we can tailor any future events to your interests.

What general format would you like future events to take (eg talks/lectures, parties, formal or informal)?

What time of the day or week suits you best (eg evening, daytime, weekday or weekend)?

Approximately how much would you expect to pay for such an event?

Would you be willing to help in the organisation of such an event?

How important an aspect of being a Friend do you consider special events to be?

We've let the grass grow under our feet...

Work here at Fishbourne never seems to end, and we certainly don't rest on our laurels when it comes to improving the Palace and its grounds. Despite this, we now have to admit that we have let the grass grow under our feet (but not in a bad way!).

We had recognised a long time ago that, following the departure of the contractors, the grounds at the western end of the site have been something of a mess. Unfortunately, you can't rush the seasons, and we had to wait until October this year before conditions were suitable for the ground to be prepared and reseeded with grass. We also made the most of the opportunity and installed a robust sub-surface that will enable the newly grassed area to be used for overflow parking for more of the year than had previously been possible. Finally, a mound of spoil at the side of the CDC has been levelled so that this area can be more effectively maintained.

We hope you agree that the overall result of all of this work is one of a much smarter approach to the site - one which befits an attraction of such renown.

Changes to Membership Rates:

From January 2008, we are afraid that it is going to be necessary to increase membership rates to £18.50 for individual members and £37 for family membership. We hope that you still think that these prices reflect excellent value for money. This is the first time that we have had to increase membership rates since the Friends were formed and we will do our best to ensure that it is the last for some time.

Please send your response to us here at the Palace (address on page 1), marking the envelope "Friends of Fishbourne". Please feel free to include any additional thoughts you might have relating to special events, or to the Friends organisation in general, on a separate sheet if necessary.